

Washington, DC – Thursday, The House of Representatives approved a Congressman Harry Teague sponsored amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to create a post-deployment mental health screening pilot-program. The adoption of the amendment is seen as a key victory in advancing the fight to make more mental health services available to service members. Earlier this month, Congressman Harry Teague introduced the Kyle Barthel Veterans and Service Members Mental Health Screening Act a bill calling for mandatory and confidential mental health assessments for service members. That legislation was named in honor of a Las Cruces who, after returning from service in combat struggled with PTSD and ultimately took his own life.

“Our veterans need and deserve the best care our nation can offer and that includes mental healthcare,” said Congressman Harry Teague, a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. “The program we are establishing with this amendment is a step in the right direction toward stemming the tide of tragic incidents associated with PTSD.”

The amendment would require the Defense Department to conduct a demonstration project at two military installations – active duty and reserve – to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of providing face-to-face post-deployment mental health screening between a soldier and a mental

health provider. The two year project will include a combat stress evaluation conducted by a qualified mental health professional within 120 to 180 days after the date the soldier return from combat theater, as well as follow-up phone calls over the next two years.

In 2008, 143 Army soldiers committed suicide – the highest rate since the Army began keeping record in 1980. According to the June 2007 report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health, 38% of soldiers, 31% of Marines and 49% of National Guard members report psychological symptoms 90-120 days after returning from deployment.

The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.